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THE
Expediency of the Miraculous Powers of the Chriſtian Fathers:
AND
The Inexpediency of thoſe that are claim'd by the Church of Rome, conſider'd.

Imprimatur,

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Vice-Can. *Oxon.*

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The Expediency of Some Divine Interpoſitions, during the Firſt Ages of the Chriſtian Fathers, conſider'd.

A

SERMON

PREACHED

In his MAJESTY's Chapel,

At *WHITEHALL*,

May 7. 1749.

Being the *Sunday* after ASCENSION-Day.

And before the

UNIVERSITY of *OXFORD*,

At St. *Mary*'s,

On *Sunday*, *July* 2. 1749.

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THE PREFACE.

THE author of the free inquiry into the miraculous powers of the chriſtian fathers, makes his boaſt in the preface of his work, that among "the "zealous champions who had attempted to refute his introductory diſcourſe, "not one had ſpent a thought in conſidering the uſe of thoſe powers, as "they are ſet forth in the new teſtament: "but by the help of a poſtulatum, that "they continued as long as they were "neceſſary to the church, they preſently extend that neceſſity, to what length "they pleaſe, or as far as they find it "agreeable to the ſeveral ſyſtems, which "they had previouſly entertain'd about "them." This

This defect therefore I have endeavoured in the following diſcourſes to ſupply from the original uſe of divine interpoſitions, in favour of chriſtianity: by ſhewing from our author's own treatiſe, that after the apoſtolick age, they continued expedient to thoſe uſes, for which they were firſt introduced, namely the quiet eſtabliſhment of chriſtianity in the world.

Our author indeed, in ſtating the heads of his diſſertation, drops the point of expediency, with the defect of which he had ſo acutely charged others: or rather takes it for granted, in the progreſs of his work, that theſe miraculous powers were inexpedient to any good univerſal end, and then argues concerning them, as ſuch. But unfortunately for his ſyſtem, towards the latter end of his treatiſe, he proves, whether contrary to his intention or not, I will not aſſert, that they *were* expedient, during the three firſt centuries at leaſt,

leaſt, to promote that end for which God had at firſt vouchſafed them.

The expediency of theſe powers being thus examin'd, I have proceeded to obviate a conſequence, with which our author endeavours popularly to affect his proteſtant readers, namely that the allowance of miraculous powers to the primitive fathers, will be a ground of credit, and ſupport to the pretended miracles of the church of Rome. My ſole intention in theſe diſcourſes is the ſervice of truth, and our holy religion, handed down to us by the aid and induſtry of the fathers. If in any degree I have hereby contributed thereunto, I ſhall give God the praiſe, and be thankful to thoſe who are candid interpreters of the work.

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MARK XVI. 17, 18.

And theſe Signs ſhall follow them that believe; in my Name ſhall they caſt out Devils, they ſhall ſpeak with New Tongues;

They ſhall take up Serpents, and if they drink any deadly Thing, it ſhall not hurt them; they ſhall lay Hands on the Sick, and they ſhall recover.

A Promiſe is here made, and a deſcription given of the perſons qualified to receive it: namely, *thoſe that believe.* It is not confined to the eleven apoſtles preſent at the delivery: for the expreſſion then would have been, *you* that believe, without a change of the perſon made uſe of in the former verſe; and not ſo extenſive, *them* that believe. *And He ſaid unto them*, i. e. unto the eleven, to whom He appeared as they ſat at meat, *go ye into all the world, and preach the goſpel to every creature.*

He

He *that believeth, and is baptized ſhall be ſaved; but he that believeth not ſhall be damned. And theſe ſigns ſhall follow* them *that believe; in my name ſhall they caſt out devils &c.* —— We ſee here a change of the perſons from the limited word *you*, to the indefinite *them*, within the compaſs of three verſes. A commiſſion to preach the goſpel, and to baptize, is given to the eleven apoſtles; a miraculous power is promiſed to *them* that believe.

This promiſe was made immediately before our Saviour's aſcenſion into heaven. The diſciples were to wait for the completion of it, at Jeruſalem, before they ſet forward upon the mighty work of propagating the goſpel throughout the world. *But tarry ye here in the city of Jeruſalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.* Luke 24. 49. This power was fully communicated to all at once, aſſembled in one place, on the day of pentecoſt, and ſenſible evidence given to them of the communication. As we read Acts 2. 1, and following verſes. *And when the day of pentecoſt was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And ſuddenly there came a ſound from heaven, as of a ruſhing mighty wind, and it filled all the place where they*

were

were ſitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues, like as of fire, and ſat upon each of them. This emblematical appearance was, no doubt, intended to intimate to them, by ſenſible tokens, that they were endued from on high with the gift of tongues. It follows, *and they were all filled with the Holy Ghoſt, and began to ſpeak with tongues, as the ſpirit gave them utterance.*

From the manner of the communication one might conclude, that this power was deſign'd to be *permanent* in the apoſtles; contrary to the opinion of a late writer, who would have it only *occaſional*; beſtow'd on each individual, at the time it was to be exerted; *pro re natâ*, as the Latins ſpeak, as particular occaſions ſhould require. Elſe, if it were not a *permanent* endowment, why was it beſtowed in this formal way, on all at once; aſſembled in one place: and not rather given to each individual, at diſtinct times, and in diſtinct places, as particular exigencies ſhould demand? But as the promiſe ſeem'd to imply ſome extraordinary durable gift to be beſtow'd on all at once in Jeruſalem, for which they were to wait there, ſo it ſeems to have been accordingly fulfilled.

Immediately after this ſupernatural endowment, this proof of their high commiſſion, they ſet forth upon the weighty task of publiſhing the goſpel to mankind: and exerciſed that power which the Holy Ghoſt had given them, for a teſtimony of the truth, in the production of many wonderful effects. "They "caſt out devils in the name of Jeſus; they "ſpake with new tongues; they were uninju-"red by the aſſault of ſerpents; they laid hands "on the ſick, and they recover'd.

This was the power communicated to the firſt preachers of the goſpel, to alarm the attention of mankind, and bear evidence to the truth. The continuance of this power in the chriſtian church, during the firſt ages, is a ſubject worthy of our examination, and more eſpecially ſeaſonable at this time, when a certain writer hath made it a matter of diſpute.

Chriſtians at preſent believe, upon the credit of the moſt pious, and the beſt reputed writers of eccleſiaſtical antiquity, who are dignified with the name of *fathers* of the church, from their paternal care of it in it's origin, that theſe powers were for good reaſons continued through the firſt centuries. Our author endeavours to invalidate their credit, from his

his characters of the perſons, and the incredibility of the facts: little attending to the expediency of *ſome* divine interpoſitions in thoſe ages: but very fearful, leſt by allowing them, he ſhould injure proteſtantiſm, in giving too much ground of credit to all the pretended miracles of the church of Rome. In one place indeed he is mighty indifferent about conſequences, where he is anſwering the objection, that his plan may affect the credibility even of the apoſtolical powers, and ſo injure the evidence of chriſtianity in general. But his fears return upon him, when the church of Rome may poſſibly gain any thing: ſo that he is more afraid it ſeems of the intereſts of popery, than concern'd about the cauſe of chriſtianity in general.

But let us call things to the impartial bar of reaſon. In diſcourſing therefore upon this ſubject, I ſhall

Firſt, enquire whether ſome divine interpoſitions might not be expedient, and therefore granted, during the firſt centuries of chriſtianity, to alarm it's adverſaries, ſupport it's teachers, and recommend it's doctrines.

Secondly,

Secondly, ſhew that the ſuppoſal of ſuch interpoſitions during the infancy of the church, can give no countenance, or ground of ſupport to all the ſubſequent pretended miracles of the church of Rome. And this may help us forward with ſome obſervations,

Thirdly, and laſtly, towards aſſigning a probable time in general for the ceſſation of miracles, and towards anſwering ſome objections and queſtions which may have been propoſed.

Firſt then let us enquire whether ſome divine interpoſitions might not have been expedient, and therefore granted, during the firſt centuries of chriſtianity, to alarm it's adverſaries, ſupport it's teachers, and recommend it's doctrines.

But ſays our author, this is to argue by hypotheſis; "to ſuppoſe the expediency, and "then infer from thence the certainty of the "facts." It would be ſo I allow, if we had nothing more to go upon, but a meer *ſuppoſition* of expediency. But if we fairly enquire whether they were expedient, that is, whether the ſame end continued to require them, which had given occaſion to them at firſt: and then proceed from the wiſdom, power, and goodneſs

neſs of God, which *had* once viſibly intereſted themſelves in the promotion of chriſtianity, to enquire, whether it is not reaſonable to conclude, that miraculous powers might be continued; ſuch an enquiry is not *hypotheſis:* nor is ſuch inference founded on meer ſuppoſition. The principle will in great meaſure at leaſt juſtify the concluſion: and *that* in proportion as the end propoſed appears more viſibly to require the means. For in every queſtion about the diſputed act of any rational agent, the end propoſed, or the "cui bo-"no," as the Latins call it, is always enquired into. He may learn that from his friend Tully, or from Tully's friend Ariſtotle; and if there was an end aſſign'd, and the act was proved conducive to that end, this was allowed to clear the way to the credibility of the fact, and prove that the act was wrought by that agent. So if the interpoſition of the Deity is to be called in; a queſtion naturally ariſes, how far the end propoſed is worthy the ſupport of the Deity, and how far the act in queſtion is promotive of that end, and expedient to it.

But does not our author proceed much more upon hypotheſis, when he firſt ſuppoſes, without any proof, that the miracles were *inexpedient*

pedient to any good end, and then argues from thence, and from the ridiculous light in which he places them, that they are utterly incredible? Who aſſigns to them ſome private end which they were not intended to promote, and then argues from thence, that they were never wrought at all: who makes thoſe works to be effected in ſupport of the private opinions of particular men, which were wrought in defence of the general doctrines of chriſtianity: and then from the ſuppoſed erroneouſneſs, or trifling nature of the doctrines, or a real exceſs of opinion in ſome few caſes, poſitively infers the incredibility of the miracles, and the impoſſibility, that providence ſhould make men of human infirmities, inſtruments of his power. Is *this* a fair enquiry? Is not this rather to beg his principles, and then found his demonſtration upon them? In this way of arguing he might produce another fair enquiry in mathematicks, wherein he might plainly demonſtrate againſt the demonſtrations of Euclid, becauſe Euclid was a man of human infirmity, and conſequently fallible: or in philoſophy prove that Tully could never be a good reaſoner, becauſe he has introduced in one part of his works the muſick of the ſpheres, which was too loud to be heard,

and

and the abſolute perfection of the numbers ſeven and eight.[a]

Not that I will pretend to vindicate every miracle that he hath artfully collected, or endeavour'd to repreſent in a ridiculous light: nor yet would I exclude learned and good writers from a capacity of common judgment, or common honeſty, becauſe they have been men of fallibility, and human infirmity; becauſe one of them has mention'd with the appearance of ſuperſtition, the preciſe number of the *four* goſpels, or the *twelve* apoſtles, as if there were ſome ſecret virtue in them; as our author's own favourite writer has introduced ſome ſuperſtitious notions of a ſimilar kind. But our buſineſs is to examine the expediency of the miraculous powers aſcribed to the fathers in general. For ſurely there is a great deal of difference between a power in general granted for a viſible, good, univerſal end; and the abuſe of it, or falſe pretenſions to it afterwards, or miſtakes of private men concerning it in particular inſtances.

Having thus obviated the objection, let us proceed to the point in hand, namely the expediency of ſome divine interpoſitions during the infancy of chriſtianity, after the days of

a Vid. Som. Scip.

the apoſtles. And here let us conſider the ſubject,

1*ſt*, in the abſtract.

2*dly*, in it's connexions with the circumſtances of the times.

And 1*ſt*, let us examine the queſtion a little in the abſtract, ſeparated from the different views, characters, and opinions of particular perſons; as relating only to a religion worthy of God, and infinitely beneficial to man.

Now, where the divine aid is called in, the end propoſed is always a principal point to be conſider'd; is to be join'd to the capacity and moral character of the witneſſes, as clearing the way to the credibility of the fact. For as God never acts in vain, ſo we may preſume, that he will not ſuffer his deſigns for the general benefit of his creatures, and the ſupport of his own glory, to be fruſtrated at any time for want of proper action. The Deity is not confined to ſeaſons, days, or years. *Whoſe counſels are of old; and whoſe goings forth are from everlaſting.* He is not obliged to circumſcribe his operations by the age of an apoſtle, by any certain number, or order of men. His counſels are limitted to no certain æra, any further than He Him-

Himſelf ſhall think proper. All the portions of time are uniform and alike in reſpect to his power, and their periods are determined by his wiſdom. When an end therefore occurs worthy of his Interpoſition, He *may* interpoſe, and no man *letteth*; *for who ſhall ſay unto Him what doeſt thou?* He who firſt ſettled the orders of Nature, may ſometimes interrupt thoſe Orders to ſhew that they were firſt conſtituted by Him, and therein confirm his authority over rational creatures by freſh inſtances of power. For to *conſtitute* or *interrupt* is equally an object of power to Him who firſt *created*, and whoſe might is infinite. *He who ſettled the round world ſo ſure, that it cannot be moved*; who appointed to the earth her orbit, and decreed that ſhe ſhould not wander from it, can yet ſtop her diurnal rotation round her axis, to favour the command of his ſervant Joſhua. He who weigh'd the creation in a balance, who eſtabliſhed the laws of univerſal gravity, and made an human body ſpecifically heavier than the waters, may yet to confirm the miſſion of his Son, command Peter to walk upon the ſea, and come unto Him.

That God almighty did in *one* age exert a ſupernatural power for the defence of chriſtia-

nity, in ſigns and mighty wonders, cannot be diſputed, or doubted by any one, who calls himſelf a chriſtian; ſeems to be allowed even by our author himſelf. A queſtion here naturally ariſes, why we ſhould ſuppoſe the exertion of this power to be confined to that age only, and to be withdrawn immediately after the death of the apoſtles, if the great end to which it was directed, was not yet fully anſwer'd within the compaſs of that age? If we have facts of miracles well recorded upon faith of hiſtory after that age? Was there any thing in the eſſential faculties of the apoſtles themſelves that contributed to this power, and neceſſarily confined the exerciſe of it to their days? Or by their death was the arm of the Lord ſhortened? The apoſtles were but Inſtruments in his hand; ſo might *others* alſo *be*, to promote or fully accompliſh the ſame beneficial end.

For if the miraculous power promiſed, and convey'd to the firſt believers, was a permanent power, to be exerciſed at their diſcretion, during the apoſtle's days; (and our author has not proved that it was *not*;) it is hard to conceive why this power ſhould be extinct in them all at once, upon the death of the laſt apoſtle, or how the ſupernatural endowments

of

of *one* man ſhould depend upon the natural life of another.

If this power, according to his own ſuppoſition was occaſional, and confer'd only at the time when it was to be exerted, then we ſee leſs reaſon why God ſhould not occaſionally make uſe of the fathers for temporary inſtruments of his power, as well as He had of the apoſtles; ſeeing this will not greatly exalt their characters. He may ſuppoſe *this*, without paying any great compliment to their private abilities, or private judgment; in which they were not under the influence of this power. For to be meerly machines of impulſe, requires neither great learning, great abilities, great diſcretion, nor great judgment.

But ſays he, "if we admit the miracles of "the fathers, we muſt admit all the miracles "of every ſucceeding age, down to the pre-"ſent:" whether this conſequence be juſt or not, ſhall be the ſubject of a future enquiry. At preſent let us examine whether the extenſive end, for which this power was introduced, was fully compleated at the death of the laſt apoſtle. This leads us,

2*dly*, to conſider the queſtion a little in it's connexions with the circumſtances of the times,

times, as relating to a religion oppoſed to the then general prevailing prejudices of mankind.

Whether chriſtianity immediately after the death of the apoſtles could be call'd an eſtabliſh'd religion, may be learnt from the concurrent teſtimony of thoſe times, both eccleſiaſtical and profane. It had indeed been propagated with great ſucceſs in the world, and many thouſands both of Jews and Gentiles were converted to the faith. But then it's converts were ſtill perſecuted and depreſs'd. The *powers* of the world, the rulers and great men were united againſt it: elſe how came the apoſtles themſelves to be martyrs? and their deaths ſurely did not convert their murderers. Mankind then was not yet prepared to admit *rational* evidence alone; ſuch therefore was neceſſary, as was *ſenſible* and extraordinary. *The Jews ſtill required a ſign, and the Greeks ſought after wiſdom.* The Jews would admit no Meſſiah, but ſuch as ſhould come recommended by ſigns anſwerable to their preconceived notions of Him; a victorious prince inveſted with temporal grandeur, who ſhould lead them to poſſeſs the gates of their enemies. The heathens would admit no religion but ſuch as might be conformable to the pre-

judices

judices of their philoſophy, falſely called wiſdom. If then, in oppoſition to theſe prejudices, the firſt fathers of the church were to *preach Chriſt crucified*; it is highly reaſonable to imagine, that their great maſter would ſend them forth with ſuch credentials, as ſhould prove the chriſtian diſpenſation to be a demonſtration of the *power* of God, as well as of the *wiſdom* of God.

Have any of the rulers, or of the Phariſees believed on Him? Was no doubt, a queſtion frequently ask'd with triumph by the perſecutors in thoſe days. Something therefore was neceſſary to alarm and convince theſe rulers. The ends for which providence had interpoſed at firſt, namely to eſtabliſh a chriſtian church, under a regular and quiet ſubordination of Government, were not yet fully accompliſhed, and therefore there is no good reaſon can be given, why the interpoſition ſhould entirely ceaſe. The miracles of Chriſt and his apoſtles had gain'd but little credit with thoſe who would not embrace their doctrine: ſome freſh inſtances of power therefore might be neceſſary to convince the opulent unbeliever, that the Deity *had* once interpoſed in behalf of this deſpiſed religion. Our author perhaps might refer them to the hiſtory

hiſtory of the goſpel for divine evidence: and the goſpel indeed was a faithful hiſtory of miracles: but what ſhould recommend the peruſal of this hiſtory to the prejudiced infidel? Some ſupernatural power was ſtill neceſſary to *open the eyes of the blind, and the ears of the deaf*, and to convert the heart of the harden'd bigot.

To prove, that this was the perſecuted ſtate of the chriſtian church, during the firſt ages of the fathers, that the chriſtian ſect was thus depreſs'd, hated, and deſpiſed, we need only appeal to the teſtimony of our author himſelf, who is ſo fair an inquirer *ſometimes*, as to introduce an argument that makes againſt himſelf, when he believes that it will make for him.

"The goſpel indeed, [a] ſays he, ſoon began "to make ſome progreſs among the vulgar, "and to gain ſome few alſo of a more di- "ſtinguiſh'd rank, yet continued to be held "in ſuch contempt by the generality of the "better ſort, through the three firſt centuries, "that they ſcarce ever thought it worth while "to make any inquiry about it, or to exa- "mine the merit of it's pretenſions. The

a Vid. Free Inquiry, p. 193.

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"principal writers of Rome, who make any "mention of the chriſtians, about the time "of Trajan, plainly ſhew that they knew no- "thing more of *them*, or their *religion*, than "what they had pick'd up as it were by chance, "from the groſs miſrepreſentations of com- "mon fame, and ſpeak of them accordingly, "as a ſet of deſpicable, ſtubborn, and even "wicked enthuſiaſts."

A more unfavourable account ſure could hardly be given of chriſtians, and the ſtate of chriſtianity, nor a more favourable one introduced to our preſent point, the expediency of *ſome* divine, ſupernatural aid and ſupport to withſtand theſe difficulties, to animate it's preachers, and to gain credit to their religion, in the face of it's enemies.

To compleat his evidence in our behalf [a] he urges afterwards the difficulty of publiſhing any books of apology in defence of the chriſtian faith, and of introducing them when publiſhed to men of dignity and fortune, who deſpiſed the authors. "In theſe circumſtan- "ces, ſay's he, it cannot be imagined, that "men of figure and fortunes would pay any "attention to the apologies, or writings of a

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[a] Pag. 197.

"ſect ſo utterly deſpiſed; eſpecially when on "the one hand, there was no elegance of ſtile "or compoſition to invite them to read." We may conſequently reply that there were not thoſe artifices, which uſually recommend an impoſture. "On the other hand, ſay's he, "were all the diſcouragements which the go- "vernment could give, to deter them from "reading."

This then, according to our author's lucky repreſentation, as we have it in his own words, was the advantageous ſtate of chriſtianity during the three firſt centuries; this was it's peaceable eſtabliſhment in the world. It's profeſſors were hated and deſpiſed; it's preachers not attended to; it's apologies never read.

And now, ſeeing all theſe impediments were in the way, to oppoſe the admiſſion of any *rational* evidence; what could remain, but ſuch as muſt immediately ſtrike upon the *ſenſes:* ſuch as muſt immediately alarm and convince the beholder, from an evident demonſtration of the preſence of the Deity? This we find in proceſs of time forced it's way, gradually ſubdued, and as it were, by a kind of violence overcame all the prejudices of mankind: and open'd the avenues of the heart to the reception of truth. But when the

the regular day-light was once admitted, the thunder and lightnings of divine power became no further needful.

But to proceed, not only the powers of the world, but the powers of darkneſs likewiſe, during thoſe ages, had ſtood up united *againſt the Lord, and againſt his Chriſt.* That there *are* certain, malicious, inviſible beings, who *will* the deſtruction of man, cannot be denied by any one, that believes the ſcriptures either of the old or new teſtament. That God for wiſe ends, beſt known to Himſelf, allows them power in this lower world over man, whether for the trial of his faith, the exerciſe of his patience, or the like, is evident from the ſame authority. That they have been ſuffer'd to effect wonders, to diſorder the bodies of men, to diſtract their minds, and deprive them of their intellectual faculties, many inſtances are recorded, as the cures likewiſe are recorded wrought by Chriſt and his apoſtles upon ſuch diſtemper'd ſubjects. That theſe beings ſhould be permitted to exerciſe their malevolent influence, after the days of the apoſtles, *with all power, and ſigns, and lying wonders, and with all deceiveableneſs of unrighteouſneſs,* we have no leſs authority to believe, than that

of [a] Jeſus Chriſt the founder of our faith, and of [b] St. Paul and [c] St. John eſpecially commiſſion'd by Him. Is it not reaſonable therefore to ſuppoſe that the ſame being who permitted theſe evil artifices, ſhould at the ſame time interpoſe an overbalance of his own power to prevent the abſolute deluſion that might ariſe from this *deceivableneſs*; to ſecure his authority; together with the moral and religious rectitude and happineſs of his people; to provide, that they might not deceive, *even his elect*? For a miracle unappoſed is ſo far an evidence for the religion it is wrought to confirm: where the miracles are unequal, the exceſs of the greater is a proof of the greater power, and if we ſuppoſe inferior beings to be engaged in oppoſition to the divine, is a proof of the interpoſition of the latter.

This principle is founded on the truth of God, who will not ſuffer his credentials to be ſo far uſurp'd, or counterfeited by evil beings, without any oppoſition, that his good and righteous ſervants muſt inevitably be deceived by them. Wherefore if the magicians turn their rods into ſerpents, in imitation of Aa-

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a Matt. 24. 24. b 2 Theſſ. 2. 9. c Rev. 13. 13.

ron;

ron; the rod of Aaron ſhall devour their rods. If the magicians ſhall call up frogs upon the land, in imitation of Aaron, God permitteth the deluſion thus far, to ſhew his greater power: for the magicians ſhall not be able to remove them: Moſes and Aaron muſt be ſent for, *to intreat the Lord, to take away this plague from the land.* So the divine power will be eminently diſtinguiſh'd, whilſt the oppoſers are called upon to effect the ſame wonders, and *cannot.* If Aaron by his rod hath turned the duſt of the earth into lice, and the magicians are called upon, and eſſay to do the ſame, but the duſt will not *live* at their command, then they may reaſonably conclude, as we find they did, *that it was the finger of God,* whereby Aaron acted. This argument, added to the internal worth of the doctrine, will always be a ſatisfactory proof.

That God has ever permitted any deluſions at all by the influence of evil ſpirits, ſtrongly proves the expediency of ſome contrary operations, but is no argument againſt his juſtice. For in caſes where men have been deceived by lying wonders, they have themſelves, like Pharaoh, contributed to the deluſion. They have helped to deceive themſelves. They received not the love of the truth, and there-

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by they called in the power of the deluder, and gave him opportunity to operate with ſucceſs. They have pleaſure in unrighteouſneſs, and are therefore unwilling to open their eyes to that light, which upbraids their conduct. They are fond to catch at any argument that may juſtify their lives, and follow any guide that ſhall ſet them free from the reſtraints of righteouſneſs. No wonder therefore that when moral agents are thus bent upon deluſion, God ſhould judicially deliver them up, as He did Pharaoh, to the power of the deluder, and that evil ſpirits ſhould be ready to compleat the conqueſt. But then we may as reaſonably infer, that the God of truth will at the ſame time interpoſe ſuch an over-balance of his power, as will not ſuffer his *ſincere* and *upright* ſervants to be led away by this craft of *lying wonders*, that He will *not ſuffer the righteous to fall for ever*.

If then evil ſpirits were permitted in the firſt centuries, to poſſeſs, and diſturb the bodies, and minds of men, that is, if the prophecies of Chriſt, and his apoſtles were fulfilled, it is reaſonable to conclude, that the pious fathers ſhould be inveſted with a contrary authority, to command them to go forth againſt their wills; to eject them from their

ſtrong

ſtrong holds; and thereby demonſtrate the ſuperiority of that power, which favour'd divine truth.

Such was the expediency of ſome divine interpoſitions during the firſt centuries of the chriſtian church: of a ſociety thus oppoſed, perſecuted, deſpiſed. And we have as good teſtimony for a foundation to ſupport our belief of the reality of ſuch interpoſitions, as for any other point of hiſtorical fact [a]. Why then ſhould we withold our aſſent? A queſtion may be ask'd, whether our author thinks, that the Deity *ever* interpoſed in behalf of chriſtianity? if he does *not*, then he owns himſelf no longer a chriſtian: if he *does*, then we ask whether it is not more reaſonable to believe, that God ſhould continue this interpoſition, till the end was fully anſwer'd in the civil eſtabliſhment of this religion; than to

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a The objections raiſed by our author againſt the credit of the fathers, and their hiſtories have been particularly conſider'd already by ſome ingenious gentlemen, in their examinations of his treatiſe, ſee *Mr. Dodwell's free anſwer*; *Mr. Jackſon's remarks*; and *the letter to the Rev. Dr. Middleton:* and therefore I ſhall not concern my ſelf with thoſe points, as being foreign to the deſign of theſe diſcourſes, which was only to ſhew the *uſe* and *expediency* of the powers; and the invalidity of a conſequence with which he would charge the belief of thoſe powers in the chriſtian fathers.

ſuppoſe

ſuppoſe that a ſociety thus oppoſed could make it's progreſs unſupported; and ſo labour to give up all faith of hiſtory, which atteſts the grant of divine aid?

The aſſiſtances of *divine grace* are, even to this day, a continual addition of ſupernatural power to man. If our author denies this aſſiſtance, he muſt at the ſame time give up the new teſtament, and deny one of the principal privileges of a chriſtian. *Are not your bodies the temples of the Holy Ghoſt which dwelleth in you?* ſaith St. Paul to the Corinthians: and to the Philippians, *it is God that worketh in you, to will, and to do, according to his good pleaſure.* If he does *not* deny it, then here is one inſtance of ſupernatural power ſtill ſubſiſting in the church. A power, which though not ſenſible in it's operations, is yet fruitful in it's effects. A power, which anſwers all the ends for which at preſent it can be wanted, namely, the guidance of individuals to eternal happineſs. But when a guidance or direction was wanting to univerſal bodies, or whole ſocieties of men, the operations muſt be ſuch as would affect thoſe bodies; not *internal*, and confined to individuals; but *external*, *viſible*, and apprehenſible by the ſenſes of whole ſocieties at once.

Let

Let not any man therefore argue that the facts recorded by the firſt fathers are incredible, becauſe they are extraordinary. For what miracles are not in their very nature ſuch? Neither let us ſay, that the fathers could not be inveſted with theſe powers; either becauſe they were men of human infirmity, and human fallibility; for ſo were Barnabas, Paul, and Peter: or becauſe they held private opinions, which he thinks erroneous; for ſo did Peter when he judaized. But no chriſtian will deny, that Peter *in the name of Jeſus Chriſt of Nazareth*, enabled the impotent man to *riſe up and walk*, becauſe he had a little before denied his Maſter. In ſhort, Peter's miracles were not wrought to recommend his Jewiſh conformity, or canonize his infirmities, but to eſtabliſh the truth of chriſtianity in general. And the ſame may be ſaid of the miraculous powers intruſted to the firſt fathers.

The authority of theſe holy men has frequently been urged with ſucceſs by proteſtants in their diſputes with papiſts, and is a ſtanding bulwark of our cauſe in many points againſt them. That the belief of hiſtorical facts related by the fathers, will give no countenance to the church of Rome, in her pretended miracles, ſhall, God willing, be the ſubject of my next diſ-

courſe. In the mean time let us not give up the credit of *all* hiſtory, but *profane*, to the crude hypotheſis of every fanciful Writer, how fruitful ſoever his imagination; how fluent ſoever his pen may be. For though proteſtantiſm may ſtand in need of the vigorous aid and defence of it's friends, amidſt all the various aſſaults of it's enemies, in their different ſhapes and colours; yet proteſtants can never be thankful to ſuch defenders, who pull down one part of the fabrick, under a pretence of repairing or ſupporting the other. Should we ſay that our author is inwardly an adverſary to the chriſtian faith itſelf, he might perhaps exclaim againſt the treatment, as not more candid, or equitable, than that, whereof we accuſe *him*, with regard to the ancient fathers, in miſrepreſenting the principles upon which they wrote. And yet from external appearances, we can have no great foundation in reaſon to eſteem that General a friendly ally to any country, who is daily making all the inroads and incroachments he can upon it's frontiers. At leaſt it would be but prudent in that country, to be upon it's guard againſt him. Let us then be cautious how we admit ſuch argument for demonſtration, how ſpeciouſly ſoever recommended by it's addreſs, which is founded upon

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begg'd unproved principles; proceeds upon miſrepreſentation; and when throughly ſifted, can ſcarce be ſtiled the ſhadow of ſound reaſoning. But as we would guard againſt the ſlavery of credulous ſuperſtition on the *one* hand, ſo let us beware leſt we be led away by the *ſlight, and cunning craftineſs* of ſceptical deſigning men, *who lye in wait to deceive* on the *other*.

May the God of truth direct our hearts and thoughts aright in the purſuit of truth, and eternal happineſs, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord!

The Suppoſal of the Continuance of Divine Interpoſitions, during the firſt Ages of the Chriſtian Fathers, proved to be no Sanction, or Ground of Credit to the Pretended Miracles of the Church of Rome.

A

SERMON

PREACHED

In his MAJESTY's Chapel,

At *WHITEHALL*,

On WHITSUNDAY, *May* 14. 1749.

And before the

UNIVERSITY of *OXFORD*,

At St. *Mary*'s,

On *Sunday*, *July* 9. 1749. being ACT-SUNDAY.

By WILLIAM PARKER M. A.
Fellow of *Balliol* Coll. in *Oxford*. F. R. S.

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J. PURNELL,

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Aug. 21. 1749.

MARK XVI. 17, 18.

And theſe Signs ſhall follow them that believe; in my Name ſhall they caſt out Devils, they ſhall ſpeak with New Tongues;

They ſhall take up Serpents, and if they drink any deadly Thing, it ſhall not hurt them; they ſhall lay Hands on the Sick, and they ſhall recover.

THIS promiſe was made to the firſt chriſtians by our Saviour, immediately before his aſcenſion into heaven. The feaſt of pentecoſt was the day of it's completion. That this promiſe was intended to confer a *durable*, *permanent* Power ſeems to follow from the manner in which it was fulfilled. The diſciples were to wait all together at Jeruſalem till they were endued *with power from on high.* For if this power was only convey'd to the apoſtles occaſionally, juſt at the time it was to be exerted, what need

was

was there for them to tarry all together at Jeruſalem, for the reception of it all at once? But it was confer'd on them all at one time, aſſembled in one place, and ſenſible evidence was given to them of the conveyance; therefore we may conclude that it was to remain with them, a *diſcretionary* power, to be exerciſed as their own prudence, and the Holy Ghoſt attending them ſhould direct.

But this may further appear from the directions given by St. Paul to the firſt chriſtians, concerning the exerciſe of their ſpiritual gifts, which would have been needleſs, had not the gifts been *permanent* and *diſcretionary*. For if they had been only *occaſional*, *temporary* infuſions, chriſtians could not well have err'd about the application of them. They would have known the time of exerciſing the power from the time of receiving it's impulſe; and have diſcern'd their proper gifts by the gifts conferr'd: as the Holy Spirit likewiſe at the ſame time would, no doubt, have actuated it's machines in a proper manner of applying them. The Holy Ghoſt would never at the very time of exerting itſelf have miſapplied it's operations, nor have *ſpoke with tongues*, when it ought rather to have *propheſied, or interpreted*.

But

But further, if theſe ſpiritual gifts were meer temporary impulſes of the ſpirit, why could not any *one* of the diſciples, at the proper time or exigency, have been impell'd to *heal*, and to *prophecy*, and to *diſcern ſpirits*, and to *ſpeak divers kinds of tongues*, and to *interpret tongues*, as well as *another*? Whereas theſe gifts appear to have been ſingular, and proper to peculiar perſons, reſiding in them according to their reſpective offices. And they were committed to each, as permanent, diſcretionary talents, to profit withal. *The manifeſtation of the ſpirit*, ſaith the apoſtle, *is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the ſpirit the word of wiſdom; to another the word of knowledge by the ſame ſpirit; to another faith by the ſame ſpirit; to another the gifts of healing by the ſame ſpirit; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another the diſcerning of ſpirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues.*

Theſe were the ſupernatural manifeſtations of the Holy Ghoſt, diſpenſed among the Corinthian converts, to whom the apoſtle wrote this epiſtle. The time of their continuance in the chriſtian church has been made a point of debate by a modern writer. In my laſt diſcourſe

therefore upon this ſubject, I endeavour'd to ſtate and inforce the expediency of *ſome* divine interpoſitions, during the firſt ages or centuries of chriſtianity, from the nature of the end to be ſerved by them, and the circumſtances of the church. For the expediency of the means to the end propoſed, muſt certainly add weight to the credibility of the facts well atteſted.

We do not indeed pretend to carry our argument of expediency ſo far as to ſay, theſe miraculous powers were expedient, and therefore *this*, or *that* particular miracle was certainly wrought. But we ſay thus; *ſome* divine interpoſitions appear to have been expedient, during the infancy of chriſtianity, in the firſt centuries, aud therefore it is not incredible, that miraculous powers might be granted to the firſt preachers of it, in thoſe centuries: *ſome* miraculous facts are *well atteſted* by the beſt and moſt pious writers of chriſtian antiquity; the *powers* alſo are ſhewn expedient to the promotion of a good, univerſal end, in behalf of which the Deity *had once* interpoſed, and therefore the facts, are highly credible.

But, ſays a certain writer, if we admit the miraculous powers of the primitive fathers, we muſt neceſſarily embrace all the ſucceeding pre-

pretended miracles of the papiſts. This leads me, as was propoſed, under my

Second general head; to ſhew, that this conſequence is not juſt: and that the ſuppoſal of ſome divine interpoſitions in favour of chriſtianity, during the firſt centuries of the chriſtian church, can give no countenance, or ground of credit to the pretended miracles of the church of Rome.

Our author, to make his concluſion valid, ſhould firſt ſhew that circumſtances are the ſame *now*, in the *Romiſh* church, as they were in the *ancient*, chriſtian, catholick church. For where men argue by analogy from the incredibility of facts in *one* age, to the incredibility of them in *another*, they ſhould no doubt ſhew the circumſtances of thoſe ages to be alike, or elſe, where is the analogy, if there is no likeneſs?

Now, in my former diſcourſe, I have ſhewn, from our author's own repreſentation, that chriſtianity during the three firſt centuries at leaſt, was in a depreſs'd, perſecuted, and deſpiſed ſtate. It's preachers were hated; it's doctrines unattended to; it's apologies never read; books of defence could not be publiſh'd without great difficulty; nor, if ſome few copies *were* publiſhed, could they find acceſs to

the courts of princes, to men of dignity and fortune. All *rational* evidence then was excluded, and ſuch only could gain admittance, as was *ſenſible* and *ſupernatural*. But now, where is the likeneſs between the ſtate of the chriſtian church in *thoſe* days, and that of the *church of Rome* at preſent? Where is the analogy either between the circumſtances of the *times*, or the expediency of the *means* to the end propoſed, namely the confirmation, and eſtabliſhment of the goſpel in the world? The church of Rome is in a ſettled, flouriſhing ſtate; the men of fortune and dignity are on it's ſide; and it's prieſts are at the helm of power. She lays claim indeed to miraculous gifts, but wherein are her miracles ſimilar in circumſtances either of expediency, or manner of production to thoſe of the firſt fathers? Are the Romiſh miracles wrought among enemies? *publickly* wrought for the converſion of enemies? ſubject to the inſpection and examination of enemies? No: her wonders have none of theſe ſignatures of truth ſtampt upon them. *Her* wonders are made up of things that are pretended to be wrought, in a country already converted to chriſtianity: wrought before friends in private, and then related to the credulous multitude: wrought to ſerve private ends,

ends, and without liberty of examination forced by meer authority of the prieſts, upon the ſuperſtitious minds of the populace.

If we argue in the abſtract, upon this generneral allowed maxim in philoſophy, *that God never acts in vain*; we may conclude that when the end is accompliſh'd, for which He firſt interpoſed, the interpoſitions ſhall ceaſe. For the all-wiſe Being, we may be aſſured, never applies *uſeleſs* means; as He will never be defective in any that are *neceſſary*. The end for which miraculous powers were firſt beſtow'd, was the eſtabliſhment of chriſtianity. But chriſtianity *is* the eſtabliſh'd religion of the Romiſh countries; therefore the *end* being attain'd, the *means* are uſeleſs.

If we argue from circumſtances, as above, they appear to be moſt unlike, and therefore there can be no analogy. The miraculous powers of former ages may have been true, where miracles are not *now*; becauſe miracles in former ages were expedient, where they are not *at preſent*.

Let us here ſtop, and examine a little our author's manner of argumentation. He proceeds by induction from ſome *few particular* inſtances, to a *general* concluſion; and becauſe ſome few ridiculous ſtories, which he hath collected,

lected, or rather *made* ſo, by his manner of repreſenting them, are not credible, therefore he concludes that no other miracles *can* be. A concluſion ſurely very extenſive! again, becauſe there are no well atteſted inſtances of dæmoniacks, ſorcery, or witchcraft, in the *preſent* age; therefore there were no dæmoniacks, witches, or ſorcerers in *former* ages: that is, becauſe the power of the devil is now *ceaſed*, therefore he never *had* any power: and the denunciations of the apoſtles againſt ſorceries and witchcrafts were of little uſe: becauſe the preſent miracles of the church of Rome are all falſe and ſpurious, therefore thoſe of the primitive ages of chriſtianity were ſo likewiſe: that is, becauſe God does not think fit to interpoſe in behalf of an *eſtabliſh'd* religion, therefore He did not think fit to interpoſe in behalf of a *perſecuted* church: of a church which He had began to plant with his *own right hand*: becauſe the miracles of the *pagans* were falſe, therefore thoſe of the *firſt chriſtians* cannot be true: that is, becauſe God did not think fit to bear teſtimony to a *falſe* religion, therefore He would never bear teſtimony to a *true* one.

The church of Rome wants not only the argument of expediency, for divine interpoſition in her favour, as being an eſtabliſh'd religion, but

but it wants likewiſe the internal evidence, and worth of the doctrines, in ſupport of which this feign'd aſſiſtance is aſſumed. For men may lay claim to what aids and aſſiſtances of the ſpirit they pleaſe, yet we cannot be more aſſured of any one truth than this, that a God of infinite veracity cannot interfere in behalf of manifeſt abſurdities, ſuch as the doctrine of tranſubſtantiation among the papiſts plainly is; yet in behalf of which many of their miracles are maintain'd to be wrought.

But we are asked, if we believe the miraculous powers of the firſt fathers, where ſhall we ſtop? This leads me to the

Third thing propoſed; namely to make ſuch obſervations ariſing from what has been ſaid, as may help us forward, towards aſſigning a probable time in general for the ceſſation of miracles, and to anſwer ſome few objections, and queſtions, which may have been propoſed.

Now here we cannot pretend to fix upon any particular, *determinate* point of time, when theſe powers muſt *neceſſarily* have expired, eſpecially in all countries at once, any more than we can enter into the counſels of the Almighty, or preſcribe to Him how long He ſhall exert his power, and no longer. But if we have ſhewn a time, from our author's *own* repreſentation,

preſentation, when miracles continued to be expedient to the great end, for which they were firſt introduced, namely the quiet eſtabliſhment of chriſtianity in the world: if afterwards we can diſcover a time, when they became *inexpedient* to this end; i. e. when chriſtianity was peaceably eſtabliſhed under the protection of the civil power; then we may aſſign the intervening portion of time, between the periods, when this expediency commenced, and ended, for the probable continuation of miraculous powers in the church. This diſquiſition muſt depend upon hiſtorical enquiries, and falls not within the purpoſe, or limits of a diſcourſe from this place. *This* however we may obſerve in general, from our author's *own* treatiſe, that he has ſhewn them to be expedient, during the *three firſt centuries* at leaſt, by ſhewing, that chriſtianity, which was the religion to be eſtabliſh'd by them, continued ſo long in a depreſſed, perſecuted, and deſpiſed ſtate; incapable of gaining any admiſſion to the civil powers by any *rational* evidence; dependent therefore upon ſuch as muſt immediately and cogently ſtrike upon the *ſenſes*. If within a certain aſſignable ſpace of time afterwards, chriſtianity became an eſtabliſhed religion, under the favour and countenance of the civil power, and fixt it's habitation in the world;

world; to that time, or near it, we may fix the æra, when it's ſupernatural ſupports were withdrawn, as becoming no longer needful.

But yet, why they ſhould ſtop in all kingdoms and provinces at the ſame moment, no ſubſtantial reaſon can be given, if they continued to be wanting in one country, or in any one province of the ſame country, longer than another. There *may* have been a twilight of divine manifeſtation, a certain medium, in the *religious*, as in the *natural* world, between meridian light, and nocturnal darkneſs; between the brighteſt illuminations of power, and their total ceſſation. The tranſition from extraordinary and wonderful interpoſition, to the abſolute removal of all miraculous evidence might have been too ſuddain.

But it no more follows, that becauſe ſome divine interpoſitions were expedient, during the firſt centuries of chriſtianity, therefore all the ſubſequent miracles of the church of Rome ſhould be expedient likewiſe, or even *uſeful* in ſucceding ages; than it follows, that becauſe a child in it's infancy cannot walk by it's own natural ſtrength, therefore he ſhould ſtand in need of ſome artificial ſupport in confirm'd manhood. In ſhort, it is reaſonable to ſuppoſe, that the ſame divine providence which

form'd it, as it were an infant in the womb, and cheriſh'd it at it's birth, ſhould continue to be it's guide and ſupport, till other guardians were provided for it; *till kings became it's nurſing fathers, and queens it's nurſing mothers.* But when by this countenance and aid it was arrived at more mature proportion, we may reaſonably conclude, that it would be left to it's own natural ſtrength, to ſupport itſelf by the nerves of reaſon and ſound argument.

Nor can any good reaſon be given, why *ſome* ſpiritual gifts might not be withdrawn from the church, ſooner than *others*, as they became leſs requiſite to promote their ends. Our author makes it a mark of impoſture in the primitive fathers, with reſpect to *other* powers, that the gift of tongues, the moſt difficult of any to be counterfeited, was the ſooneſt withdrawn, and left without pretenders to it. Whereas a good reaſon might be aſſign'd for this difference: for when preachers of the goſpel were not obliged to travel from one nation to another, in order to propagate the goſpel; that is, when in every nation, preachers were grown up, of it's own countrymen, properly qualified to execute this office, then we may ſuppoſe, that the gift of tongues being no longer expedient, might conſequently

ly be withdrawn. But *other* gifts might yet notwithſtanding be convey'd to thoſe preachers, for their confirmation againſt the oppreſſions of the world; for the conviction of unbelievers; to gain reſpect and attention to their doctrine from their *own* countrymen.

But ſtill we are asked, if we admit the miraculous powers of the primitive fathers, where ſhall we ſtop? Why, ſuppoſe we know not the exact period where to ſtop, does it follow that theſe powers therefore never exiſted in the fathers? It may perhaps be impoſſible for us to know preciſely where to ſtop, in things tranſacted at ſuch a diſtance; in things which depended entirely upon the determinations of divine wiſdom, after many hiſtories of thoſe times have been long extinct. In *ſome* things we may be able to fix the boundaries of ſcience: but in caſes of *moral* evidence it may be very difficult to determine where the bounds of moral truth end, or thoſe of falſhood begin. For inſtance, where ſhall we fix the diſtance of probable truth, in facts related upon human teſtimony from remote countries, in our *own* age? Many ſeeming improbabilites arifing from the remoteneſs, and variety of climates, have yet been in themſelves real truths. Many falſhoods on the contrary, have put on the face of pro-

 bability,

bability, and been reported with ſucceſs. But if we have received falſe relations from the diſtance of a *thouſand* miles, ſhall we confine all truth to the diſtance of *five hundred?* and withdraw our belief from every thing beyond? If we cannot fix any diſtances of truth as to remote regions, muſt we believe either *every* thing, or *nothing*, that we are told concerning them? ſo although we cannot point out the preciſe period of time for the expiration of miraculous power in the primitive fathers, muſt we believe *every* miracle that is told us upon the *ſlighteſt* grounds? or believe *none* that are related upon the *beſt* authority? ſurely this would be a very extenſive way of inferring concluſions! In ſhort the character of the witneſſes in all other reſpects, added to the expediency of the facts, as means to ſome good end, ſhould be our criterion in ſuch caſes.

The age of unconteſted hiſtories is uſually a recommendation of them, and that they have kept their ground with approbation for many years, is generally look'd upon as a good preſumptive argument in favour of their authority. But it is not ſo, it ſeems, with reſpect to the chriſtian fathers. And yet what reaſon can be given why *they* in particular ſhould be excepted from the benefit of this rule? were

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there no enemies to chriſtianity in the *primitive* times to examine facts, as well as in *our* days? No ſcepticks in thoſe ages, who would have been ready to detect the pious fraud, and expoſe the holy impoſture? or is the task of repelling error reſerv'd to the diſtance of above a thouſand years? when all the circumſtances that confirm'd the facts are not known? when many hiſtories are loſt? reſerved for a man of might, much wiſer than all his predeceſſors in the field; of more daring courage to confront, and of acuter talents to detect any inſidious falſhood?

If he can find any imperfection or weakneſs in the books of thoſe venerable writers, or their way of expreſſing things by figures and emblems, which was more to be attributed to the cuſtoms of the times, and the prevailing manner of expreſſing ſentiments in thoſe days, than to any abſurdity in the meaning of the writers themſelves, he induſtriouſly collects them together, and places them in their full light: yet if any ingenious perſon were to collect, and as artfully heighten every idle ſuperſtitious ſentence, that may be found, in his own favourite author, concerning the deification of his own daughter, or any prevailing notions of the times in which he lived; to aggravate, and draw forced concluſions

ſions from thoſe paſſages which expreſs his ambition, his baſe puſillanimity, his mean dejection under adverſity, and the like; the heathen philoſopher, *Tully*, might appear in full as ridiculous a garb, as the chriſtian father, *Irenæus*. But the treatment would be equally cruel with regard to *either* of them, to exclude *either*, on this account, from the poſſibility of being in other reſpects a judicious writer. The truth is, we do not pretend to ſay that the fathers were divinely inſpired in all their writings, like the ſacred penmen in the holy ſcriptures, though even *there* St. Paul tells his converts in one place, where he gives his *own* opinion as a man, where *he* ſpeaks, *and not the Lord*; yet for a general teſtimony to the truth, they might in *ſome* caſes be aided with extraordinary gifts. Spiritual gifts, though they made them *powerful preachers* of the goſpel, yet ſtill left them *frail, imperfect men*. If then ſome of thoſe good and pious men, to whom theſe powers were committed, held particular opinions, we are not obliged to follow their opinions, but ſcripture: if ſome of them to avoid the ſnares and temptations of the world, and become inſtances of ſtricter abſtinence and virtue, choſe to lead a retired and ſolitary life, their choice of life is no juſtification of the preſent luxury or indolence of modern monkery. But

But an objection is made to the places, or forms, in which the powers of the fathers were exerciſed, becauſe they have been ſince miſapplied, and converted to evil purpoſes by the church of Rome. Now if a divine anſwer was given, in conſequence of any appeals made by the fathers, at the tombs of the martyrs, we may fairly ſay, that it was not given to confirm the virtue or ſanctity of their relicts, but the truly chriſtian doctrines of religion and morality taught by the fathers: not to inſtruct the world that the bones of martyrs were to be worſhip'd, but that the catholick doctrines deliver'd by thoſe martyrs, and taught by the fathers were worthy of God, and of divine confirmation: not to ſanctify *private* opinions, or *particular* modes of life, but to recommend chriſtian faith in general. If ſome publick place muſt have been choſen where the appeal might be made, what place more proper than the church of God, where the congregation was aſſembled? And if the *feet* of the martrys was at any time the moſt conſpicuous place, it might therefore be made *there*, to confirm the doctrine of the martyrs. The church of Rome may have perverted this practice afterwards to evil purpoſes, but they want the argument of expediency, and many other

other circumſtances to confirm their miracles, in the midſt of a friendly country. There was no intrinſick energy in the *tombs* or *relicks* of the martyrs: neither was there any intrinſick efficacy in the *clay*, to open the eyes of the blind, in our Saviour's time. Yet we read, *that he ſpat on the ground, and made clay, and anointed the eyes of the blind man therewith*, and gave him ſight. The reaſon was *ſome* viſible means were thought proper to be made uſe of, and then *clay*, being as indifferent as any, and as viſibly inadequate to the effect, was thought as proper, as any other, to be applied. Thus Moſes by divine direction ſmote the rock twice with his rod, not to ſhew that there was any internal force in the rod to make the waters flow; but to prove to the Iſraelites by *viſible tokens*, that divine power was their ſupport, and that in conſequence of this appeal to God, *the waters guſhed out, and the ſtream flowed withal.* And thus when ſome appeal was to be made to the Deity by the fathers, to confirm a religion truly divine, it was thought proper that it ſhould be made in ſome open place, and by ſome viſible ſigns, to convince the audience that the Deity anſwer'd the appeal made by the application of theſe ſigns. The duſt of the martyrs had no more

efficacy

efficacy in it than common clay: but the ſanctuaries of the martyrs, being in places dedicated to holy aſſemblies, and holy purpoſes, might be judged proper places of addreſs to the Deity for divine aſſiſtance. That ſuch miracles are now counterfeited in the ſame places, by the church of Rome, when they can anſwer no real religious purpoſes, is no more an argument, that they were never wrought, when they *could*, than if the church of Rome were to pretend *now* to reſtore ſight to the blind, by an ointment of clay, it would follow, that our Saviour had never perform'd the cure, by the uſe of the ſame inadequate means. Or that Moſes had never by the ſtroke of his rod *fetch'd water out of the ſtony rock*, if a popiſh prieſt ſhould pretend in theſe days to have effected the ſame wonder.

I am not now concern'd about vindicating facts, but weighing conſequences. And here I ſay, that the abuſes of things are no argument againſt their realities; nor modern pretenſions to powers, a proof that they *never* exiſted. And it no more follows that the tombs, or duſt of the martyrs could not have been made uſe of by the firſt fathers, as ſenſible ſigns of ſome power to be wrought, in conſequence of an appeal to the Deity, by the application

of thoſe ſigns, becauſe the church of Rome now makes relicks an object of worſhip; than it would follow, if our Saviour's garment were now in being, and the papiſts worſhip'd it, that in our Saviour's time, *as many as touched the hem of his garment, could not have been made whole.* Or than it would follow, that if St. Paul's handkerchiefs or aprons were in their poſſeſſion, and made an object of their adoration, therefore it could never have been true, *that God wrought ſpecial miracles by the hands of Paul, ſo that from his body were brought unto the ſick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diſeaſes departed from them, and the evil ſpirits went out of them*[a].

In ſhort, God at this very time annexes ſacramental grace to the uſe of outward ſacramental means: why might He not then in the firſt ages, for the ſatisfaction and more ready conviction of the beholders, annex ſupernatural gifts likewiſe to the uſe of extraordinary viſible ſigns?

The river Jordan had no more *natural* efficacy in it to heal the leproſy, than Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damaſcus, yet God was pleas'd to appoint this viſible means to heal

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a Acts 19. 11, 12.

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Naaman. But it does no more follow, that the river Jordan is now intitled, on this account, to any veneration from it's inhabitants, than it follows, that the pool of Bethesda can heal now, or is to be worship'd in these days.

The objections made to the credibility of some miracles of the fathers, seem to be principally grounded on their strangeness, or greatness, without any remembrance of that general promise of our Saviour, John 14. 12, 13. *Verily, verily I say unto you, he that believeth, on me,* (the words we see are general, not confined to the persons of the apostles) *the works that I do, shall he do also, and greater works than these shall he do, because I go unto my father; and whatsoever ye ask in my name, that will I do, that the father may be glorified in the son.* The very words imply some vouchsafement of *peculiar* power by the son to true believers, wherein the glory of the father might be more conspicuously display'd.

That the gift of healing was not confined to the persons of the apostles, or to their days; we may conclude from the general direction of St. James, added to some other general precepts, given to the Jewish converts, without limitation of time to *that* age only: chap. 5. 14. 15. *Is any sick among you? let him call for*

the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith ſhall ſave the ſick: and the Lord ſhall raiſe him up; and if he have committed ſins, they ſhall be forgiven him. Here is a promiſe made; perſons aſſigned, to whom a gift of healing is communicated; namely the *elders* of the church: a ſign inſtituted; namely that of *unction*; but no *time* is limited; no confinement to the *apoſtolick* age: we believe therefore, upon good credit of hiſtory, this power to have continued ſome time after, in the church: i. e. as long as extraordinary marks of divine favour were neceſſary for it's ſupport. If our author would confine this direction concerning the ſending for the elders of the church, and the expreſs intimation concerning their power to recover the ſick, to the days of the apoſtles, he might with a little more pains, confine the former general directions, in the preceding verſe likewiſe, and ſay that none *that were afflicted, ſhould pray*, or none *that were merry, ſhould ſing pſalms*, after the age of the apoſtles. For the expreſſion in one verſe is as indefinite, as in the other, and to be limited only by circumſtances of expediency, and the like. It is not ſaid let him ſend for the *apoſtles*, but indefinitely let him

him ſend for the *elders* or *prieſts*. But we ſee the inconſiſtency of our author in different places, who according to his reſpective purpoſes, can be the moſt *credulous*, and at the ſame time the moſt *incredulous* man living: who on account of a [a] ſtory brought from Paris, can believe that an hundred men might ſpeak *without* tongues in a natural way; and yet cannot believe that an equal number of men might, in the days of the holy fathers, ſpeak divers languages *with* tongues, by the inſpiration of the Almighty.

We may add one remark further, to what has been obſerved in favour of the continuation of miraculous powers; that by a kind of natural influence on the preſent conſtitution of man, miracles were beſt adapted to promote the ſpeedy reception, and eſtabliſhment of chriſtianity in the world, throughout the firſt centuries. The minds of the illiterate, and common people, are for the moſt part, much more ſtrongly affected by *ſenſible* objects, eſpecially ſuch as are *extraordinary*, than by cloſe, and long deductions of *reaſon*. For the *ſenſes* cannot but anſwer the impreſſions made upon them by outward objects: *they* cannot

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a Free Inquiry, pag. 184.

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but make their report to the ſoul, from thence: *they* are open, even in men whoſe *underſtandings* are clogg'd and overwhelm'd with prejudices: *they* are ſtrong and quick, even in men whoſe *intellects* are weak, and dull.

The firſt ſenſations of things, and perceptions of ſimple ideas, are neceſſary, determinate, and ſimilar in all. *They* are not, by any force of the underſtanding, to be deſtroy'd at pleaſure: *they* are not improved by education, nor weaken'd by want of literature; but depend upon the natural organization of the nervous filaments. Any extraordinary impreſſions therefore upon *them*, are calculated to awaken the peaſant, as well as to alarm the philoſopher. And when the *intellects* are awaken'd by the calls of *ſenſe*, they may afterwards apply themſelves vigorouſly, and attentively, to the conſideration, and improvement of *rational evidence*. Thus the firſt impreſſion upon the ſenſes would be the act, and free grace of the deity; men's improvement of it, and their conſequent faith, would be their own virtue.

As we find then, that the deity in compliance with our faculties, in other inſtances, has ordain'd *viſible* tokens of his operations, and graces, and actuates men according to what they *are*, namely *ſenſitive*, as well as *intellectual* beings;

ſo

ſo where *his* teſtimony was required, to the ſupport of a doctrine reveal'd by *him*, it is reaſonable to conclude, that this teſtimony would be adapted to the reſpective capacities of thoſe his creatures, for whoſe benefit it was deliver'd. Accordingly St. Paul ſays, *we ſpeak* wiſdom *to thoſe that are* perfect; to thoſe that were of capacities to receive *rational conviction*, the apoſtles argued by force of *reaſon*, upon the great myſteries of chriſtianity: but to his converts, the Corinthians in general, he ſaith, *my ſpeech, and my preaching was not among you, with enticing words of man's wiſdom, but in demonſtration of the ſpirit, and of power:* it conſiſted in ſomething that might alarm, and gain the attention of the ſenſes, in order the more readily and effectually to convince the underſtanding; *that your faith ſhould not ſtand in the* wiſdom *of* men, *but in the* power *of* God. Our author in like manner excludes the holy fathers from "elegance "of ſtile, or compoſition, to invite men to "read:" conſequently the greater need was there, why they ſhould be ſupported, in a ſimilar manner, *by demonſtration of the ſpirit, and of power.*

We may reaſonably conclude from the might, wiſdom, and goodneſs of God, whoſe graces

graces and gifts are all perfect in their kind, that this power would continue to operate, as long as the deity ſhould find it expedient to the end propoſed, namely the peaceable eſtabliſhment of the revelation required, to promote the *happineſs* of his creatures. For the deity is not weary in well-doing: and all exertions of power, whether they appear *ordinary*, or *extraordinary* to *us*, are *equal* to *Him*, whoſe might is infinite. *Haſt thou not known? haſt thou not heard*, (ſaith the prophet concerning the diſpenſation of the goſpel kingdom,) *that the everlaſting God, the Lord, the creator of the ends of the earth fainteth not, neither is weary? He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might, He increaſeth ſtrength. Behold the Lord God will come with ſtrong hand, and his arm ſhall rule for Him.*

The conſtant courſe of nature is a continued proof of his exiſtence, power, and wiſdom. When the proof of a revelation from Him is required, a repeated interruption of this common courſe, ſhall be an evidence of his agency, who alone can ſuſpend the univerſal laws of nature: and whilſt mankind are aſtoniſhed at the effect, the truth of God ſhall be eſtabliſhed.

Our

Out author has proved, that *ſome* divine teſtimony was wanting, to recommend chriſtianity, after the age of the apoſtles. *Senſible* tokens, according to the common nature of man, would be moſt apt, and ſpeedy in their operation, to affect the minds of the populace: they might be requiſite, to *convert* the hearts of *many*, and to command their attention to the goſpel hiſtory; requiſite, to *confirm* the wavering faith of *others*, in the *belief* of it; therefore we think it not unreaſonable to believe, that ſuch influences might be continued, after the apoſtolick age. Hiſtorical facts are added, to evince the grant, of what expediency ſeem'd to require, therefore we find it reaſonable to give credit to the relations made by the chriſtian fathers.

There remains one queſtion, that may ariſe from what has been ſaid on the argument of expediency, with a remark upon which, and an inference from it, I ſhall conclude this diſcourſe. The queſtion is this: a great part of mankind ſtill continues involv'd in darkneſs: are not miracles therefore ſtill expedient for their converſion to chriſtianity? We anſwer, they *may be ſo*, when it ſhall be God's appointed time to convert them. The all-wiſe Being may confer his graces and illuminations, at

what periods, and upon what people he pleaſes. He may convert the remaining part of the world by other evidence, or by inſtances of power different from any that have been yet diſplay'd. For we cannot carry our argument for the expediency of miracles ſo far, as meerly from thence to infer the certainty of their exiſtence in any age, without teſtimony. But when facts *are* well atteſted by good and credible hiſtorians, then to be able to point out the expediency of thoſe facts to ſome good, univerſal end, is a cogent argument of their credibility. We have no well atteſted facts of this kind at preſent, from *unconverted* countries, and in *chriſtian* nations they are inexpedient, therefore we believe that the powers themſelves are intermitted.

If chriſtians are only a ſmall part of mankind in reſpect to the whole, we know that this is not the only inſtance, in which God hath choſen to himſelf a peculiar people, out of the whole race of mankind. The Jews were a long continued inſtance of his ſupernatural protection, and frequent interpoſition: and if the Jews were caſt out, it was for their unworthineſs; if many Gentiles are yet unconverted, it may ariſe from their own obſtinacy. For there are few parts of the world perhaps, in which chriſtia-

chriſtianity hath not been once offered. We cannot ſay determinately, as to the eaſtern parts at leaſt, how far their own wickedneſs or miſconduct may have contributed to the removal of the goſpel from them. *This* we know, that the *ſeven candleſticks* were removed from the *ſeven churches:* and we know, that the light alſo hath been removed ſome time from that city, which is now the metropolis of Turkey.

But as we are not to ask, why the goſpel was not revealed ſooner to mankind, or why men were not from the fall of Adam baptized chriſtians; ſo neither are we to ask of God, why chriſtianity is not at this day extended further; any more than we are to enquire of him, why many parts of the globe, perhaps ſome of the richeſt, and moſt fruitful ſoils, are ſuffer'd by his providence, to remain yet unpeopled, or yet uncultivated, or yet entirely undiſcover'd: or, than we are to ask, why he did not by an immediate act of his power, convert all mankind to chriſtianity at once, either at the birth, or crucifixion of Chriſt. In ſhort, ſomething was to be accompliſh'd, ſome preceding ſteps were to be taken by the *divine* agency; ſomething was to be left to *human* agency; ſomething to be perform-

ed by the virtue, and ſincerity of men. For the great author of our religion, himſelf ſaith, *whoſoever ſhall not receive the kingdom of God*, or the belief of chriſtianity, *as a little child*; i. e. with the ingenuous ſimplicity, and unprejudiced ſincerity of a little child; *he ſhall not enter therein.* We learn from ſcripture, that in due time the *fulneſs of the gentiles ſhall come in: and all Iſrael ſhall be ſaved:* i. e. according to the ſacred language of the holy ſcriptures, both Jews, and Gentiles ſhall be converted to the chriſtian faith. Preparations and openings may be now making for this grand event, as there were many ages before the diſpenſation of the goſpel to mankind. Miracles may again revive; or *other* evidence may ſucceed in their room. From what has been already done, we may conclude, that *all* the divine prophecies ſhall be compleated. But let us remember that *a thouſand years are with the Lord as one day, and one day as a thouſand years.* The preſent age may hereafter be eſteem'd but the childhood of chriſtianity, in compariſon of it's future progreſs, as the three firſt centuries are by *us* ſtiled it's infancy. Let us remember that without *ſome* evidence at leaſt of divine interpoſition in thoſe ages, chriſtianity might have been cruſh'd in it's tender

years

years, never have taken any root in the world at all, but have been utterly extinct almoſt as ſoon as it appear'd. But it was God's will to eſtabliſh a church upon earth, and conſequently it was his pleaſure to grant all neceſſary aids to promote the eſtabliſhment. Why it is not extended further, is beyond the juſt limits of human enquiry: we have no right to call in queſtion the meaſures of his providence. *For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been his counſellor? His judgments* (we are told) *are paſt our finding out; though in ſome inſtances of power, his footſteps* have *been known.*

However, from a foregoing remark one ſerious inference ariſes to ourſelves. The *candleſtick* hath been removed from the ſeven churches: let us take heed, that for our unworthineſs it be not alſo moved from *us*: let us take heed that *the kingdom be not taken from* us, *and given to a nation that ſhall bring forth the fruits thereof:* ever cautious leſt by our evil conduct under the advantages of divine light, *we give occaſion to the enemies of the Lord to blaſpheme*; to reproach the privileges which we enjoy in Chriſt Jeſus: ever ſtudious that by the ſincerity of our profeſſion, and conſequent holineſs of our lives,

lives, *we may adorn*, and recommend to the nations yet unconverted, *the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things. This* if we do, we need not fear, but that God will preſerve his religion and church among us ſecure as to any dangers, that may ariſe, from the deſigning favours, or undiſguiſed aſſaults of it's enemies: *from the peſtilence that walketh in darkneſs; and from the ſickneſs that deſtroyeth at the noon-day.*

F I N I S.

10 JA 66

Lately Publiſh'd,

The Nature and Reaſonableneſs of the Inward Call and Outward Miſſion to the Holy Miniſtry conſider'd. A Sermon preach'd before the Right Reverend Father in God Thomas Lord Biſhop of Oxford, at the Ordination held at Chriſt-Church, on Sunday, Dec. 22. 1745. And before the Univerſity of Oxford, at St. Mary's, on Sunday, March 2. 1745-6. by William Parker M.A. Fellow of Balliol College in Oxford.

The Natural Effect and Religious Improvement of extraordinary Divine Judgments, and of Solemn Faſts inſtituted in Remembrance of them. A Sermon preach'd before the Right Honourable the Lord Mayor, the Aldermen and Citizens of London; at the Cathedral Church of St. Paul, on Friday Sept. 2. 1748. Being the Anniverſary Faſt appointed for the dreadful Fire in London in the Year 1666. by the ſame Author.

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